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## **GOVERNOR PATRICK VISITS DOG ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HELPING VETERANS, DISABLED ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH**

PRINCETON - Thursday, September 4, 2014 - Governor Deval Patrick today visited the National Education for Assistance Dog Services (NEADS) national headquarters in Princeton, touring a training facility that prepares puppies to assist veterans wounded in combat. Since 2006, NEADS has operated the Canine for Combat Veterans (CCV) Program and has placed 58 fully-trained assistance dogs with qualified veterans free of charge. The Governor was joined on the tour by Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Coleman Nee.

"Assistance dogs bring independence, confidence and self-sufficiency to some of our most vulnerable residents," said Governor Patrick. "For disabled veterans returning home, this service can help aid their transition back to civilian life and empower them to bring their new skills to our growing economy."

In 2006, NEADS became the first organization of its kind invited to Walter Reed Army Medical Center to give a presentation about how assistance dogs can help wounded vets. Drawing a great deal of interest, NEADS recognized the opportunity due to the growing wounded veteran population to form the Canines for Combat Veterans program.

"Massachusetts leads the nation in providing benefits and services to our veterans and their families," said Secretary Nee. "Partnering with tremendous organizations like NEADS and other non-profits, we are able to maximize our resources to ensure disabled veterans have access to resources that will enhance their quality of life."

During the Governor's tour of the facility, he visited the Early Learning Center, attended a training demonstration and listened to success stories from clients whose lives were transformed by their assistance dogs and through the help of NEADS.

"We are honored that Governor Patrick and DVS Secretary Coleman Nee could visit the NEADS campus today to experience the training and ultimate benefits of a highly trained assistance dog that provides life-changing independence, companionship and connection for people with a disability," said NEADS CEO Gerry DeRoche. "Our Canines for Combat Veterans program has placed 58 assistance dogs with veterans since 2006, and these men and women benefit from the dogs functional and emotional task work allowing them in many cases to re-engage with their communities, families and colleagues. NEADS provides our highly trained assistance dogs at no cost to qualifying veterans."

Established in 1976 to provide canines to people who are deaf and have a disability, NEADS is an accredited, internationally recognized, non-profit organization. The dogs become an extension of their handlers and bring freedom, physical autonomy and relief from social isolation to their human partners. NEADS has trained over 1,500 dogs in the past 38 years for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, people with a variety of physical disabilities, wounded combat veterans, teachers, ministers and therapists, children on the autism spectrum and children with physical disabilities. Following the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, NEADS created their Pawsitively Strong Fund, which provides free assistance dogs for the survivors of the bombings with permanent physical disabilities.

Partnerships with the Patrick Administration have expanded the use and availability of assistance dogs. Through Chapter 257 legislation, the Department of Mental Health can provide citizens with service dogs for medical need. The Department of Veteran Services' SAVE program provides special veteran education programs for veterans that will be receiving the service dogs.

More than 385,000 veterans currently live in Massachusetts, including 42,000 men and women who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11. The Patrick Administration has worked to ensure newly returning veterans, as well as Massachusetts' aging veteran population, continue to receive quality health, housing and employment services to honor their service.

To learn more about services for Massachusetts veterans, visit [www.mass.gov/veterans](http://www.mass.gov/veterans).

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